

# May goes for power with a swift U-turn over human rights

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Theresa May ditched George Osborne's austerity policies and her own pledge to pull Britain out of the European Convention on Human Rights yesterday as she sought to clear her path to No 10.

The home secretary made the two surprise moves, which she hopes will broaden her appeal among Tory MPs, as she launched her leadership campaign flanked by two cabinet colleagues on either side of the EU referendum, Chris Grayling and Justine Greening.

Mrs May, who backed Remain, ruled out any possibility of a second referendum as she sought to reach out to her former opponents. "Brexit means Brexit," she said, adding that it was the duty of MPs to implement the vote, and pointing out that she had not claimed that the sky would fall in if Britain left.

In a message aimed as much at reassuring nervous Conservative MPs as jittery markets in Britain and elsewhere she also said there would be no general election until 2020, and that she would not trigger the formal two-year talks to leave the EU until the "British negotiating strategy is agreed and clear" — with no prospect that that would come this year.

Her most surprising move, however, was to scrap an earlier promise to take Britain out of the convention on human rights. A month ago she said it was not the EU Britain should leave but the convention. "The ECHR can bind the hands of parliament, adds nothing to



Show of support: Theresa May with her husband, Philip, in London yesterday

our prosperity, makes us less secure by preventing the deportation of dangerous foreign nationals, and does nothing to change the attitudes of governments like Russia's when it comes to human rights," she said.

However, answering questions yesterday Mrs May abandoned that position, saying there was no parliamentary will for the move. That shift has helped to win her the backing of influential figures such as Dominic Grieve, the former attorney-general, who has opposed previous attempts to withdraw from the Strasbourg court.

Her other significant shift was to commit to ease Mr Osborne's austerity programme by ditching the pledge to run a surplus by the end of the

parliament. "While it is absolutely vital that the government continues with its intention to reduce public spending and cut the budget deficit, we should no longer seek to reach a budget surplus by the end of the parliament," she said — a message that leaves open the possibility that the government will still be borrowing more than it raises in taxes by the end of the decade.

In the face of warnings of a post-Brexit plunge into recession, she said that her priority would be to avoid raising taxes. "If before 2020 there is a choice between further spending cuts, more borrowing and tax rises, the priority must be to avoid tax increases, since they would disrupt consumption, employment and investment," she said to cheers from an audience of Conservative supporters.

Mrs May appeared to suggest that the long-term future of those citizens of European Union countries who are living in the UK at present might well be in doubt.

"Until a new legal agreement is reached with the EU, which will not happen for some time, the legal status of British nationals living or working in Europe will not change, and neither will the status of EU nationals in Britain," she said.

Boris Johnson, her former rival, had earlier suggested that all EU citizens now in Britain would retain the right to stay, with only new arrivals likely to be subjected to a points-system check before being allowed to stay.

Mrs May said later that this issue would be resolved in the negotiation with the rest of Europe.



Theresa May's bid for leader of the Tory party is the culmination of a political career that began at the age of 12, when she joined her local Conservative association

## Ice queen reveals a warm side in private

### Profile

Theresa May works on her red boxes until 3am, studies every secret surveillance warrant placed on her desk by MI5 and deliberates for as long as she thinks necessary over policy decisions (Sean O'Neill writes). She likes to be in control.

Only on walking holidays with her husband, Philip, and when cooking for friends does she allow herself to relax.

In her kitchen, at home in Sonning, Berkshire, Mrs May has upwards of 100 cookbooks but not a single one by Delia Smith, whose recipes she finds far too prescriptive. She prefers the "handful of this, handful of that" Jamie Oliver approach.

The image of the home secretary tearing up basil leaves is hard to conjure when the public face is that of a steadfast, rather humourless,



Lord Wasserman, who advised the Home Office on police reform, says the ice queen image is misleading. "She is warm, she's just not very outgoing," he says. "She doesn't walk into a room and take over."

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Born Theresa Mary

politician who doesn't shy away from confrontation.

Perhaps her finest political moment to date was the speech to a hostile audience at the Police Federation in 2014, when she called them out for "mouthing platitudes" over corruption and malpractice. It was a terrifying and tense occasion before it became a triumphant one.

Sir Peter Fahy, former chief constable of Greater Manchester, says: "She's politically astute, totally professional and very good on detail — which might come in useful when it comes to negotiating with Europe."

A former Whitehall official recalls how, in crucial meetings, Mrs May could chill the room: "She lets the silence fall, then she zeroes in and nails it down. In private though, she could not be nicer, she can be very generous."

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### Clashes with Gove

#### The "Trojan horse" plot

In 2014 the pair engaged in a furious briefing war over claims of extremist Muslim infiltration of some Birmingham schools. Sources close to Mr Gove said the problem arose from the Home Office's failure to "drain the swamp" of extremism. Mrs May said she had written to him saying he had failed to act when alerted to concerns in 2010.

#### Extremism

Mr Gove still holds the hardline views on tackling extremism he espoused in his controversial 2006 book *Celsius 7/7*. Mrs May adopts a subtler approach, and was angered by Mr Gove's attempts to plead his case directly to the prime minister.

#### Human rights

In one of her few interventions in the referendum campaign, Mrs May argued that Britain should withdraw from the European Convention on Human Rights, regardless of the result. Next day, Mr Gove's Ministry of Justice said her statement was not government policy.

#### Saudi prison contract

Last October, Michael Gove persuaded David Cameron to cancel a £6 million deal to provide prison services to Saudi Arabia after an intense battle with the foreign secretary, Philip Hammond. Mr Hammond, supported by Mrs May, had accused Mr Gove of naivety.

Brasier in Eastbourne in October 1956, the only child of the Rev Hubert Brasier, a Church of England vicar, and his wife Zaidée, she was a conscientious schoolgirl and cricket fan — her childhood sporting hero was Geoffrey Boycott. Aged 12 she joined the local Conservative association but her father insisted her politics were low-key because he wanted the community to feel he was there to serve everyone.

At Oxford, where she studied geography, she was introduced by Benazir Bhutto to Philip May, who is a year younger, at a Conservative group disco. The couple married in 1980, when she was working at the Bank of England, and he was "the rock" who guided her through the personal traumas of the following years when her father was killed in a car accident and her mother, who had multiple sclerosis, died shortly afterwards.

The Mays have not had children. "It just didn't happen," she said in a rare personal interview in 2012. "You look at families all the time and you see there is something there that you don't have."

Mrs May is still a regular churchgoer and, as her father advised, continues to resist being "a showy politician".

Inevitable comparisons have been drawn with Angela Merkel, also a clergyman's daughter. Mrs Merkel, however, has proved her mettle as a leader at home and on the world stage. Mrs May has yet to face that challenge.

STEFAN ROUSSEAU/PA; ALAN DAVIDSON/SILVERHUR

# How the would-be leaders are lining up on policies

Georgie Keate compares the frontrunners' past and present positions

## Theresa May, 59 1-2



**Brexit** Stayed quiet during the campaign. She only made two speeches, one of which was to say the UK should quit the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). She has made clear that "Brexit means Brexit. There must be no attempts to remain inside the EU, no attempts to rejoin it through the back door and no second referendum."

**Immigration** Has promised to curb migration and restrict the open-door policy for EU nationals if she becomes leader.

**European Convention on Human Rights** Said in April that the UK should leave the ECHR regardless of the referendum result. To her, the convention is the reason that hate preachers such as Abu Qatada and Abu Hamza could not be deported. However, she scrapped that idea during her announcement to run for leader saying it was a divisive issue and did not have support in parliament.

**HS2** Has always voted in favour of HS2 in parliament

and has argued that the rail link is necessary to improve "economic growth" and the UK's infrastructure.

**Ambitions** Has repeatedly avoided questions over her leadership ambitions. She said last month: "David I hope is going to carry on until 2020. There's no vacancy ... as I said there's no vacancy. Whatever I say to you is going to be taken this way or that way — there's no vacancy. I hope David is going to continue in the job until 2020."

## Michael Gove, 48 3-1



**Brexit** His anti-EU stance is based primarily on sovereignty over law-making. An outspoken opponent of EU regulation, he believes the UK will be freed from arbitrary rules made by an unelected EU Commission. Would go to Brussels determined to remove the UK from its grip and leave the single market.

**Immigration** Argues that the

UK should be able to choose who migrates to live in Britain, rather than accepting anyone from the EU. Wants a points-based system.

**ECHR** Thinks the real enemy is the European Court of Human Rights but has said he could not guarantee the UK would remain signed up to the convention. This has led to speculation that he would unveil a British bill of

rights to replace the Human Rights Act.

**HS2** Defended the high-speed rail link against critics who say the money should be spent on smaller projects.

**Ambitions** Said in August 2012 that he would be perfectly happy to "sign a piece of parchment in my own blood saying I don't want to be prime minister".

## Andrea Leadsom, 53 9-2



**Brexit** Was a leading light among Brexiters with a financial background. Believes the single market is flawed and argues that countries such as America have more success selling into it than Britain.

**Immigration** Believes free movement within the EU will overwhelm the UK and does not think open doors with eastern Europe has enriched Britain. Is likely to reject

freedom of movement and put UK outside single market.

**ECHR** Supported a motion to repeal the Human Rights Act, which codifies the ECHR into British law. Suspicious of any influence from Europe but may be satisfied by releasing the UK from the European Court of Justice.

**HS2** Opponent of the project, arguing it is not value for money. Has promised to fight

against the new line, having written to rail bosses saying it would devastate wildlife habitats.

**Ambitions** A little-known minister until the EU referendum debates and has not been questioned on her leadership ambitions. Her performances attracted many supporters from MPs who persuaded her she would be an effective Brexit prime minister.

## Stephen Crabb, 43 20-1



**Brexit** Campaigned for Remain but has said since the result that immigration is the "red line" in Britain's negotiations with Brussels. Claimed he would push for "as close as economic relationship with the EU as we do now" but "end the supremacy of EU law".

**Immigration** Supports changes being made to the Human Rights Act to stop it being "abused" by illegal immigrants who do not wish to return home. Has also supported cutting benefits to migrants and said that entry

to the UK should be limited to "genuine cases and workers with vital skills".

**ECHR** Ran head on into an ECHR ruling as soon as he became the work and pensions secretary. The Supreme Court struck down his attempt to make a family with a disabled child pay the so-called bedroom tax, saying it contravened the ECHR. His spokesman said he "fundamentally disagreed" with the ruling.

**HS2** A big fan of HS2 and has argued that it will transform

Welsh economic performance. He has also said rail infrastructure had reached capacity and needed to be expanded to avoid "choking off" growth.

**Ambitions** Said in February: "I don't think I have an ambition to become leader, really. It doesn't feel that long ago in my life that the thought of becoming an MP seemed outlandish and unrealistic, so to find myself a few years ahead sitting at the cabinet table doing a job for Wales, I just feel incredibly blessed with that really."

## Liam Fox, 54 33-1



**Brexit** A prominent figure on the Tory right, he has always been an outspoken opponent of the EU. Has said the UK must leave altogether and refuse to accept freedom of movement from the EU to the UK. However, he still wants Britain to trade with the single market "just like America".

**Immigration** Wants a points-based system. Does not think access to the single market is

worth "uncontrolled immigration".

**ECHR** Would like to withdraw from the treaty and have a British bill of rights. "Britain's laws should be decided by Britain's parliament and adjudicated by Britain's courts," he said.

**HS2** With a seat in Somerset, he has remained quiet on the high-speed rail line although has repeatedly said that the

government ought to cut public spending.

**Ambitions** Ran for leader in 2005 but beaten by David Cameron. Colleagues say he has harboured ambitions since. He said in February: "Never say never again. We'd have to wait and see. At my age, at 54, nowadays in British politics that's almost geriatric. According to the media, you've got to be in your thirties or forties."

## Her speech unspun by Philip Collins

### This is not a game

The first of a series of remarks pointed in Boris Johnson's direction. The hint of class disgust and the accusation that, for some, politics is sport is a direct accusation that Mr Johnson is not serious. It is also a hidden suggestion that leaving the EU will hurt.

If you are from an ordinary working-class family, life is just much harder than many people in politics realise. Frankly, not everybody in Westminster understands what it's like to live like this and some need to be told that it isn't a game. It's a serious business that has real consequences for people's lives.

Brexit means Brexit ... to allow British companies to trade with the single market in goods and services but also, to regain more control of the numbers of people who are coming here from Europe.

I grew up the daughter of a local vicar and the granddaughter of a regimental sergeant major ... I know I'm not a showy politician, I don't tour the TV studios, I don't gossip about people over lunch, I don't go drinking in parliament's bars. I don't often wear my heart on my sleeve. I just get on with the job in front of me. If ever there was a time for a prime minister who is ready and able to do the job from day one, this is it.

Following last week's referendum, our country needs strong leadership to steer us through this period of economic and political uncertainty and to negotiate the best possible terms as we leave the EU. We need leadership that can unite our party and our country.

### Ready and willing

This passage positions Mrs May as the archetypal shire Tory. For a woman who has been home secretary for six years we know very little about her. There are echoes of "not flash, just Gordon" in this. The speech works even though it is, once again, a barb at Mr Johnson, which became unnecessary as soon as she sat down.

### Mark my words

The first three words are, again, loaded at Mr Johnson, who seemed to be wriggling on the question and also designed to reassure the Tory members that Mrs May, a Remainer, accepts the mandate. On the dilemma of reconciling trade with migration she says nothing of note. That is for another day.

### Get used to it

Mrs May illustrated this by listing her achievements at the Home Office. We are going to be seeing Abu Qatada's picture a lot because of Mrs May's triumph in deporting him. The whole speech contrasted competence with chaos and gravity with comedy. It was well written, solidly delivered, and it worked.